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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000049

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: CALLS TO POSTPONE DIYALA ELECTIONS

Classified By: Classified by PMIN Robert Ford, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During his December 30-31 visit to Diyala Province, Kurdish and Shi'a political leaders explained to visiting PMIN their demands for a postponement of the January 31 provincial elections in Diyala. The leaders cited security and logistical concerns to justify a delay, though it seems their main motivation is to stave off electoral setbacks. Sunni Arab interlocutors insisted that the elections take place January 31 as scheduled and denounced efforts to derail them as undemocratic and potentially destabilizing. The province's senior election commission officer and senior security force commander each told PMIN that the security situation was conducive to elections and that all of the logistical mechanisms were in place. Should efforts to postpone the elections succeed, the majority Sunni Arab population, already alienated by GOI security operations, will react negatively, and stability and normalization in the troubled province will likely be set back. PMIN underlined to his Shia and Kurdish interlocutors that we see no reason to delay the election in Diyala and national level Iraqi government officials have told us that they will not seek to delay Diyala's election. End Summary.

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Diyala Kurds Seeking Elections Delay  
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¶2. (C) The Kurdish political parties are calling to postpone the scheduled provincial elections, citing security and logistical concerns. The security situation remains tenuous in Diyala, Provincial Council Chairman Ibrahim Bajellan told PMIN December 31. Kidnappings and assassinations continue to occur with disturbing regularity, he stated. The GOI's security operation, "Operation Benevolent Diyala" failed to destroy insurgent elements by concentrating its effort on relatively peaceful areas (e.g., Khanaqin) and leaving other, more dangerous, places untouched, Bajellan charged. In fact, Bajellan stated that areas such as Qara Tapa and Jalula are still controlled by AQI. The security situation in the province is much the same as it was in December 2005, during the last election, he assessed. Another reason for delay is logistical in nature, he asserted. Many Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) will not be able to vote in the elections. Bajellan explained that of the twenty-five thousand families displaced from Kurdish areas of the province, only two thousand have returned. These IDPs will be effectively disenfranchised in the provincial elections, he complained.

¶3. (C) Bajellan was also concerned about election fraud and specifically complained that the Governorate Elections Office (GEO) is staffed with 70 percent Sunni Arabs - and suggested that irregularities could result from such a biased composition of the Elections Office. PMIN countered that security in Diyala appeared no worse at the end of 2008 than it was in late 2005 ) indeed, it appeared far better given the sectarian fighting that occurred in late 2005 in Khalis and Mada'in. Ultimately, however, Bajellan conceded that he was worried that the Sunni Arabs will gain a majority on the provincial council, and a Sunni victory could result in a

change of governorate policies less hostile to Baathists. This would, he predicted, lead to a new escalation of violence in Diyala.

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Shi'a also Seek Delay  
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¶3. (C) The major Shi'a political parties are also calling for postponing the provincial elections. Provincial Council member Ali al-Tamimi (ISCI) told PMIN December 30 evening Qmember Ali al-Tamimi (ISCI) told PMIN December 30 evening that he feared that the Shia parties would also lose seats in the new Provincial Council. He argued that the forced displacement of Shi'a would be the primary cause for this loss. He estimated that thirty-five thousand families are currently displaced and that many of these have moved to other regions and did not register there. PMIN noted that the election commission has set up special centers for IDP voting. Dr. Ahmed Hameed Khalaf (from Ibrahim Ja'ffari's Reform Party) also complained to us that many people are not aware of the voting centers' locations. Khalaf also warned that fear and intimidation will keep many Shi'a from voting, primarily those living in Sunni-majority areas. PMIN underlined that we would work closely with Iraqi security forces to ensure people could vote. It was incumbent on parties like Khalaf,s to help us identify problem areas, PMIN added. PMIN also pointed to the deployment of Iraqi election observers, and Khalaf agreed that the presence of elections observers would be vital in minimizing voting irregularities.

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Sunnis Insist the Show Must Go On  
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¶4. (C) In a December 30 meeting with the provincial leadership of the (Sunni Arab) Iraqi Islamic Party, also attended by several Diyalan IIP members of the CoR - the national parliament, Sunni Arabs insisted to PMIN that the provincial elections take place on schedule. Deputy Governor Auwf Rahoumi claimed that many of the province's problems will be solved with elections. From his perspective, the main problem is that the (Sunni Arab) majority is being ruled over by the (Shi'a) minority in Diyala, causing sectarian tension and violence from both sides. Rahoumi believed the security situation in Diyala, while still difficult, has greatly improved and saw no legitimate reason for delaying the elections. However, he claimed that (Shi'a) Governor Ra'ad has been pressured by Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa party to postpone elections. (An emissary from Maliki, senior Shi'a parliamentarian Ali Al-Adib, visited Diyala on December 29 to discuss elections.) In turn, Auwf continued, the Governor has tried to pressure him to call for a postponement. Should the elections be postponed, claimed Salim Jabouri, prominent parliamentarian and native Diyalan, apathy amongst the citizenry would result and stability would diminish in the province. IIP Diyala Provincial Council member Sheikh Basus argued that the reason Shi'a and Kurdish parties were calling for a postponement was simply because they fear losing. He continued that many of these parties were not prepared for elections and did not select the best candidates for their lists. (Comment: Interestingly, the IIP leadership in Diyala has put forward almost all new faces on its provincial council candidate list ) a fact that they took pride in highlighting to us. End Comment.)

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Elections and Security Officials See no Cause for Delay  
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¶5. (C) In separate meetings with PMIN, both the province's senior elections official and the senior Iraqi Army commander in the province said that the security situation in the

province was adequate for elections. Recent operations in Diyala have degraded the abilities of insurgents to launch terrorist attacks to a great extent, General Abdel Karim stated to us December 31. He was openly derisive of the province's political establishment, dismissing local politicians as corrupt and ineffectual. The General assessed that the Provincial Council had accomplished very little for the citizens of Diyala and continued that in his opinion, "reconstruction has not really begun in the province." (He added that if he had control of the Diyala governorate, project funding, he could launch reconstruction expeditiously.)

¶6. (C) Amer Latif, the Governorate Elections Officer (GEO), shared General Abdul-Kareem's opinion that the election could take place on schedule. According to the GEO, all the mechanisms and processes are in place and his office was ready for the January 31 elections. Latif nonetheless complained that IHEC, the national elections commission, had ignored his repeated requests for additional resources, and said he was only staffed with 50 percent of his authorized positions. Latif, himself a Kurd, also acknowledged a sectarian imbalance among GEO staff (which we heard separately was 70 percent Sunni) and said he was trying to correct the imbalance if the IHEC would allow him to hire more staff.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) At first glance, it may seem easy to sympathize with Q7. (C) At first glance, it may seem easy to sympathize with Kurdish and Shi'a arguments that provincial security woes and logistical obstacles merit a postponement of the elections. For several years, Diyala has been one of Iraq's most violent provinces, with VBIEDs, suicide vests, sectarian militias, AQI and sectarian militias all regular features on the landscape. However, it is also true that security conditions in the province have improved significantly, and while the local elections infrastructure is far from perfect, it is apparently at least as functional, and probably more, than in ¶2005.

¶8. (C) The GEO and local security commanders are better qualified than political parties to deliver objective judgments on whether Diyala is ready for elections, and both have said that it is. The province's majority Sunni population, already alienated by a controversial GOI security operation launched in the summer, which has netted 1150 Sunni detainees out of a total 1200 detainees, would certainly be further alienated by a delay driven by the electoral fears of Shi'a and Kurdish rivals. This, in turn, would likely stunt

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the province's process of post-conflict rehabilitation. Fortunately, while Diyala's local Shia and Kurdish political leaders quietly urge delay, national level Iraqi officials have assured the Ambassador that they do not intend to seek a delay in Diyala's elections End Comment.  
CROCKER